

**City of Shelton
54 Hill Street
Shelton, Connecticut
06484**

**Reference: Subcommittee on Federalism and the
Census
Congressman Michael R. Turner, Chairman**

Testimony of Mayor Mark Lauretti,

My name is Mark Lauretti and I am the Mayor of the City of Shelton. Thank you for your invitation to testify this afternoon on the critical issue of Brownfields Redevelopment and to provide local officials with an opportunity to discuss impediments which affect our ability to address Brownfields related issues.

The City of Shelton is located in Fairfield, County Connecticut. We are a community which has made the transition to a 21st Century economy but one that still has remaining Brownfields issues which are remnants of the heavy industrial uses which were prevalent along our Housatonic River Valley and our Naugatuck River Valley. Beginning in 1991 the City of Shelton has embarked on an ambitious program of downtown revitalization and we have made significant strides working in partnership with the United States

Department of Environmental Protection, the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, and the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development. Our efforts have embraced the concept of public and private participation and meaningful citizen participation. Our efforts involve local and regional officials and we have made important strides towards cementing ongoing relationships. I would add that the Federal government has made important strides as well, however, several issues still persist which require your attention.

Given our commitment to smart growth and the desire to put abandoned properties back to work it is inconceivable that Brownfields redevelopment is not a national priority. Funding levels are meager at best and communities without experienced staff have little opportunity to access the current programs of the US EPA. While some meaningful regional collaboration has been fostered, such as our own Naugatuck Valley Pilot, funding remains a major impediment to timely progress.

The newer funding initiatives which have been offered by the US EPA are excellent in the ability of communities to access remediation funding; however, these programs are also under funded and offered only once annually. Programs that have developed experience and capacity are hampered by the lengthy application and review process. We applaud our own Region 1 officials for their efforts to provide excellent

technical assistance and timely responses to every request we make. They are hampered however by limits of funding and processes which are not conducive to a faster track. One program that stands out as being user friendly is the EPA “Targeted Site Assessment” program. This program combines a simple user friendly application with timely decisions and very meaningful technical assistance to local and regional site evaluations.

It is difficult to conceive that there is no comprehensive registry of Brownfields sites after all of the time and investment that has been made to launch National Brownfields awareness. This should be made an immediate priority. The Congress should consider a requirement that the US EPA create this program, fund it properly and implement it over the next several years. Considerable field work has been accomplished which could immediately be folded into this program and speaking for our community our information is ready to be shared with Federal, State, and Regional officials.

In respect to the Committee’s interest in obtaining input concerning H.R. Bill 4480 our community’s position is as follows. Every tool possible should be employed to attack the issues of sites that are dormant due to historical contamination. The proposal included in this legislation to offer tax credits is appropriate and should prove to be a valuable weapon in the arsenal of tools which will be needed to make real progress in addressing the estimated number of sites needing

attention in Connecticut and nationally. This is not the only approach to be used. Government needs to find ways to lower the cost associated with Brownfield remediation. This will create the truest form of incentive for private entrepreneurial expertise to effect a positive change; one that benefits all. I would respectfully suggest however that the offering needs to be user friendly to both large and small developments and to communities that have institutionalized programs and those that lack staff capacity.

The private businessman is the best vehicle to use when trying to expand the tax base through Brownfield remediation. We must allow them to do it!

The extent of the Brownfields problem has been described as a federally created problem due to the Superfund law that was passed in 1980. This is true in some respects. As a result of that law an environment has been created that discourages owners to find out if their property is contaminated. This has promoted owners of such properties to abandon them, along with general reluctance to sell the property, for fear of liability and their associated costs. Brownfields are defined as abandoned or underutilized properties that are not redeveloped due to the fear of real or perceived environmental contamination.

The current Brownfields Law, the Small Business Liability Relief and Brownfields Revitalization Act of 2002 provides some protection against liability but does

not address the high redevelopment costs associated with redeveloping Brownfield sites and does not provide enough of an incentive for voluntary action.

The current Brownfields program has done a good job at redeveloping what some would describe as the less problematic sites that are either not that contaminated or in places that are highly desirable. However, with the current level of resources the overall magnitude of this important issue will never be resolved.

Let's mention something about how sprawl has affected many states and Brownfield remediation can help reduce sprawl. There is no question that new private investment is naturally inclined to seek out opportunities that will allow them to realize a reasonable return on their investment and to minimize their risks. Brownfields should become the preferred areas for new private investment using financial incentives such as tax credits to reawaken these forgotten neighborhoods. Once this has started pressure can be reduced to develop pristine open spaces and our valuable farmlands for new private investment.

Current EPA programs are a step in the right direction but additional tools are sorely needed to foster more development outside of the US EPA, particularly private sector funding. Incentives, included in legislation similar to HR 4480 can certainly improve the climate for attracting new private investment in our urban centers or to sites possessing urban characteristics.

While we share the hope to use these financial incentives we also hope that the federal government recognizes that other non economic development activities, such as parks and public spaces also contribute greatly to community rebuilding and that programs and financial assistance should be tailored for those sites, which contribute indirectly to economic development as well.

We hope that additional legislation which compliments HR 4480 would be the motivation for owners of cold storaged sites — sites that are held onto by the current owners with no intention of selling or redeveloping the land — to start cleaning up the property and eventually sell or redevelop the site themselves.

Again on behalf of the City of Shelton please accept our thanks for providing us with the opportunity to support national initiatives which will truly lead to “Smart Growth”.